

LETTERS FROM READERS

Racism in South Africa

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

It may seem strange to complain that an article entitled "Racism Comes to Power in South Africa" [by T. C. Robertson, in the November COMMENTARY] is altogether too optimistic in its interpretation of events in that country. Yet this is the case, and the charge extends to the title. For racism has not "come to power" in South Africa; it was firmly seated in power from the first day of the Union's existence, and has steadily gone on to new triumphs, irrespective of which wing of Afrikaner nationalism has been in power. Nor is it a problem which is moving towards a solution, even to the extent that this may be claimed in our own deep South. In that respect the article is eminently useful, as making clear that an already bad situation has now become worse. The non-white population of South Africa is worse oppressed today than it was in the two provinces which were then a part of the British Empire, the Cape and Natal, a half century ago.

Indeed, Afrikaner nationalism has from the beginning centered on the racial issue, and this was crucial throughout its century of struggle against British rule. Whatever one may say against British imperialism in South Africa, it did recognize that the native was a human being entitled to some rights, and—at least on occasion—it introduced policies which sought to give him some role in the government and administration of his own country. The Great Trek which led to the establishment of the two Boer republics was precipitated by such policies in the Cape Colony; the "freedom from British rule" which the Afrikaners sought was in large part freedom to rob, murder, and enslave the native Africans without interference from Whitehall. Again, one of the main issues which led to the Boer War at the turn of the century was the action of the Boer republics in banning the activities of the London Missionary Society because it encouraged the natives to think that they had rights.

If the Boers lost their war against Britain in a military—and perhaps an economic—sense, they won it politically. For the British, as usual ashamed of a victory gained through an un-sportsmanlike advantage of numbers, agreed

that they would restore self-government to the conquered Boers without first granting the suffrage to the natives. Subsequently, they permitted the unification of the two previously British colonies with the former Boer Republics, thereby permitting the Boers, through their defeat, to acquire control of all South Africa. The only vestige of the former British liberal principles which was permitted to enter the constitution of the Union was a provision protecting the suffrage of the Colored inhabitants of the Cape, and even this has been whittled away subsequently.

The differences between Smuts and his Nationalist opponents on the racial question have been similar to those between the "respectable" leaders of Mississippi's Dixiecrats and the late Theodore Bilbo. Indeed, the parallel could be carried further since, like the Dixiecrats, Smuts has been closely tied up with finance capital (largely British—hence his affection for the Commonwealth) while his opponents have represented the same sort of back-country anti-capitalism as did Bilbo. There are, to be sure, liberal elements in the United party, but they form a small minority. That party's electoral propaganda was, in fact, largely devoted to dissociating itself from even the very moderate concessions to liberalism made by Mr. Hofmeyr.

It is perhaps not generally remembered that many of the restrictions on natives—and most of those on South Africa's East Indians—were introduced by governments headed by Smuts. This, of course, does not in any sense exonerate the Nationalists, who have always managed to keep their racism at least slightly more blatant. (In passing, it is worth noting that the Nationalist-Labor coalition, whose record Mr. Robertson praises, was responsible for the passage of the Color Bar Bill, which prohibits the entrance of natives into skilled trades.)

I find it somewhat surprising that, in discussing Nazi influences in South Africa, Mr. Robertson fails to mention the role of Oswald Pirow. After all, Mr. Pirow was more openly and blatantly pro-Nazi than any other major political figure in South Africa—and he carried on his activities from the position of Minister of Defense in the Hertzog-Smuts coalition government. And when, on the outbreak of the war, that coalition broke up, Mr. Pirow's frankly

Nazi New Order party secured a number of seats in Parliament.

It may be that anti-Semitism *per se* was not one of the original elements of Afrikaner nationalism, as Mr. Robertson asserts. But a generalized xenophobia and a strong distaste for traders and financiers certainly were, and both these had a considerable role in preparing the way for a ready acceptance of Nazi doctrines. Whatever the pledges which Dr. Malan has made and may make to South Africa's Jews, his representative at the United Nations, Eric Louw, has urged that they be deprived of citizenship. (Mr. Louw, incidentally, represented the Union in Washington during the Hertzog-Smuts coalition.) To be sure, it may be possible for those Zionist leaders who have approached Dr. Malan for an alliance on a basis of common hatred against Britain to achieve some sort of temporary accommodation. Since even Hitler's anti-Semitism admitted of exceptions, they may perhaps be able to persuade the Nationalists to concede them the status of Honorary Whites. But, if the Nationalists continue in power for any prolonged period, the chances for increased anti-Semitic legislation are considerable. The Malan government is already placing obstacles in the way of Jewish immigration. And even if the United party, in which South Africa's Jews have a role of some importance, should temporarily return to power, the question would still remain of whether Jewish security can be built on participation in the oppression of four-fifths of the country's population.

There seems to be no hope whatsoever, on a basis of past experience, that the dominant white minority in South Africa will ever surrender its position voluntarily. It is therefore all the more important to take note of the methods through which South Africa's non-white population can hope to exert pressure on the Herrenvolk. Probably the most important of these is economic organization. Although it has barred them from skilled occupations, South Africa has permitted its non-whites to secure almost a monopoly on the dirty and difficult tasks, and to furnish a large part of the lower clerical and commercial employes. It has, to be sure, refused their unions legal status and subjected them to various forms of persecution, the latest of which is a prohibition against collection of money by native organizations without government approval. But it has not been able to block their organization altogether. (When the Minister of Labor in the Nationalist-Labor coalition cabinet received a delegation from the native Industrial and Commercial Workers Union, the result was his forced resignation and a split in the Labor party to which he be-

longed.) With the increasing industrialization of South Africa, the possibility of native economic pressure for political ends will increase. Closely related to this is the weapon of passive resistance, so far used mainly by South African Indians. It has from time to time wrung some concessions from the government, and it has recently been resorted to by the Colored inhabitants of the Cape in an effort to resist the present government's efforts to further curtail their rights.

It is doubtful, however, whether these instruments will by themselves be sufficient to achieve the democratization of South Africa within historical time. Recent experience has shown that a sufficiently ruthless government can drown trade unions and passive resisters in a sea of blood, and there is little doubt that, left to themselves, the Afrikaners would do just that. The one thing restraining them is the existence of a world outside South Africa, which is capable of exerting some pressure. The Dominions of India and Pakistan have already caused the Union serious inconvenience by economic sanctions; it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that when they have settled their differences with each other, they will be in a position to take even stronger measures. Meanwhile, South Africa's policies have served to produce widespread resistance both in London and in the United Nations to her efforts to extend her sway to other territories within and adjacent to her borders. Whatever promises the government may make in regard to the treatment of the natives in these areas can carry little weight with any African native and should carry no more with the outside world. Yet it is possible that the hope of eventually expanding its borders with British and international consent will serve to moderate the racism of the Union of South Africa, at least to the extent that the need of conciliating foreign opinion modified Hitler's racism prior to 1938.

MAURICE J. GOLDBLOOM

New York City

When Bookmen Disagree

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Your reviewer, Mr. David Daiches, declares, regarding Solomon Goldman's remarkable *The Book of Books*, that "the extraordinary hodgepodge of quotations referring to the Bible in the 'Echoes and Allusions' section is absolutely baffling. There seems to be no principle of selection here at all, but only a wild and unequal mass of texts." Mr. Daiches is under the impression that Dr. Goldman should have quoted according to some principle, say of literary merit, or of social significance. Herein he misses

the point about as widely as he could. It is perfectly obvious to me that Dr. Goldman undertook the admittedly impossible task of showing the omnipresence of the Bible influence among *all* sorts of people, the illustrious and obscure, the wise and stupid, the serious and trivial and even the drivelling. Mr. Daiches notes that "nowhere are any of Milton's own eloquent statements about the Bible quoted." Then adds: "Is it contempt for the intelligence of the 'average reader' or an unbecoming sense of inner insecurity about the ability of the Bible to stand up on its own feet that makes the author feel that he needs endorsements from 'celebrities' to bolster his case?" Actually *The Book of Books* is written on a level which demands a good deal of intellectual persistence and concentration from any reader, average or above average. The section "Echoes and Allusions" fails—as it was bound to—to reproduce the actual substance of the interpenetration of the mass mind by the influence of the Bible. But that very failure is its success. It needed a lot of courage to achieve this indirect result, and it needs a bit of *sechel* to appreciate it.

MAURICE SAMUEL

New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In reply to Mr. Samuel, I can only say that "Echoes and Allusions" contains far more references to the Bible as a *word* than as a book, and a numerical count of the number of times the *word* "Bible" occurs in the written and spoken discourse of "all sorts of people" proves nothing whatever about the "interpenetration of the mass mind by the influence of the Bible." One might as well cite the number of times "Jesus" is used as an expletive as evidence of the influence of Christianity. The idea that the number of times a word is used proves anything at all about the extent to which the idea or thing originally represented by that word has influenced people seems to me to be absurd.

The influence of the Bible can only be proved by citing ideas, attitudes, and expressions which derive from it. If Mr. Samuel thinks that such a view indicates a lack of *sechel*, I can only wonder what sort of *chachamim* he moves among.

DAVID DAICHES

Ithaca, New York

Against Popularizing

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I take Mr. Cushman's letter in the November COMMENTARY criticizing my review of Dr. Cohen's and Dr. Grayzel's books as an explicit, if indirect, confirmation of what I tried to say.

I had only implied that the aim inspiring the two authors was obviously nothing more than the attraction of as many easygoing readers as possible, and not that revelation of the "sublimity" of our Jewish heritage which is promised in Dr. Grayzel's preface. Mr. Cushman frankly offers as the main reason for his praise of the two works the fact that thirty-three thousand copies of *Pathways* and nineteen thousand copies of Grayzel's *History* have already been sold. This argument, it seems to me, helps indeed to clarify the situation.

If the number of copies sold could sufficiently demonstrate the value of a book, what about, say, the world-wide popularity of thousands of silly detective stories and the infinitely more limited reading public for good literature, what about the comics and cross-word puzzles which are certainly far more intensely studied by an overwhelming majority of newspaper readers than even the best reports of the best political analysts? If the number of copies sold or not sold were any sound criterion of the importance of a book, why should one bother at all about writing a review? The "must" items of our reading lists could, then, be ascertained far more objectively by sales figures than by any "subjective" appraisal.

And the use of the work as a textbook? Has Mr. Cushman never heard of bad textbooks?

Mr. Cushman feels certain that "*Pathways* has removed the dust of centuries and enables us to see the panorama of the past in clearer perspective." I think that *Pathways* has marred the stark eternal beauty of our Bible by the use of cheap modern cosmetics. I believe that, not only from the viewpoint of the scholar but even as popular reading, Dr. Cohen's and Dr. Grayzel's books are not good enough; and, as I tried to state, I think there are objective reasons for disliking this kind of popularizing and my wish to make the reading public aware of its perils.

DAVID BAUMGARDT

Washington, D. C.

Oil and Israel

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

We should like to comment on three statements in Ernest Aschner's article "Can Oil and Israel Mix?" in your November issue.

1. Mr. Aschner states: "So far, oil . . . is, because of the negative attitude of the Jewish leaders . . . conspicuous by its absence from the official and private perspectives of Israel."

Oil exploration and exploitation were included in Jewish thinking and planning in the early 20's. The late Israel Rosoff . . . and other Jews engaged in prospecting which, of course, was done with no publicity. . . . Palestine Min-

ing Syndicate, Ltd. . . . prospected for oil and received an oil exploration license in the Southern Dead Sea area. For utilization of the license, the Syndicate, in cooperation with others, founded Jordan Exploration Company, Ltd., which is engaged in oil drilling exploration work.

2. Mr. Aschner writes: "Not only did nobody in authority among Palestine's Jews ever encourage friendly relations with the British executives of the I.P.C., or of the Haifa refinery. . . ." The Palestine Economic Corporation and the Jewish National Fund are the principal owners of the Haifa Bay area where the terminal of the I.P.C. and the oil refineries were erected. The landowners welcomed both establishments, placed land at their disposal, and did everything they could to facilitate the realization of their enterprises. . . . Relations between our representative in Haifa and British executives of the I.P.C. and of the Haifa refineries have been excellent.

3. Mr. Aschner writes: "What is there imperialistic or undignified in establishing auxiliary chemical industries in Palestine. . . ?"

The Palestine Economic Corporation, in conjunction with Palestine Potash, Ltd., the Baron de Rothschild Foundation (PICA), and a South African group of investors, founded a chemical manufacturing enterprise, called Fertilizers & Chemicals, Ltd., with initial capital of over one million dollars. This company's first factory is now being erected next to the refineries. It is one of the objects of the company to cooperate closely with the refineries. The August issue of *Chemical Industries* states: "Refinery operations will provide a tremendous reservoir of raw material for chemical manufacture."

JULIUS SIMON
President

Palestine Economic Corporation
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

My article suggested that top-level relations between the big international oil companies and the Jewish authorities . . . could be considerably improved for the benefit of all concerned. . . . Mr. Simon's comments do not deal with the overall picture which I tried to analyze, but concern statements which, out of context, convey the opposite impression from that given in the article. In reply to the three points raised by Mr. Simon I would like to say:

1. The activities of the Palestine Mining Syndicate and of the Jordan Exploration Company have no bearing on the international aspects of Middle East oil developments as dis-

cussed in my article. The fact that "oil exploration and exploitation *were* included in Jewish thinking and planning in the early 20's" (*italics mine*) does not disprove the subsequent negative attitude of the Jewish leaders. . . .

2. Mr. Simon surely knows that had the P.E.C. and the J.N.F. refused to put the land at the disposal of the oil companies, the former British High Commissioners were empowered by law to expropriate these lands. That the representative of the P.E.C. in Haifa had "excellent" relations with the British executives of the I.P.C. hardly disproves my contention that nobody in authority among Palestine's Jews *encouraged* friendly relations with the British I.P.C. executives. . . .

3. The quotation from *Chemical Industries* states a point I did not quarrel with. The establishment of the new chemical plant and the intention to cooperate with the refineries are just what the doctor ordered, and here I would say: More power to Mr. Simon.

ERNEST ASCHNER

Larchmont, N. Y.

Congratulations

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Having had occasion recently to extend for a three-year stretch my charter subscription to COMMENTARY, I wish to follow that practical approval with my congratulations to you and your editorial board upon the continued excellence of the magazine. The inaugurated standards have been scrupulously maintained, and in some respects advanced. As I near the end of my sixty-eighth year, I am old enough to have lived through the great flourishing season of American magazines, and to have enjoyed the supremacy of the Big Four—*Atlantic*, *Harper's*, *Century*, and *Scribner's*. To my mind, the subsequent descent from that Sierra of literary periodicals was deplorable. The establishment of COMMENTARY and its admirable record of achievement have helped to encourage me to hope for a renaissance.

RAY C. B. BROWN

Detroit, Michigan

Note

The volume of interesting, cogent letters received from our readers in recent months has completely overflowed our available space. We regret the delay in publication that this has necessarily meant, and ask our readers' patience. —Ed.